



**LOOKING
DOWN
THE
ROAD**

**POETRY
BY
MARK CLEMENT**

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Poetry by *Mark Clement*



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The sunny roadway
is parted by rumbling steel.
The birds are silent.

Looking Down the Road

The earth has its way, folds seasons
across this gray country road.
Fiery red, lingering green and fulgent yellows
blur the destination. Beginnings
are lost in the waning summer sun.

The woods, a tangle of brown and black,
are alive with adventurous dancing lights.
There is no path, no beginning, no end.
Should I leave this cherished artery
to struggle in such determination?

The man-made byway beckons strongly.
It's an easy path with few bumps
and will surely lead me home, lead me
out of this muddled season, keep me
upright as I wander the landscape.

The world turns and turns and slides
around the sun while I stand on this roadway,
wondering, wondering which way to go.

Leaving the Road

I left the sunshine road
where heated summer secrets
disappear into a transparent sky.

The ditch was dry and I felt
coolness flowing from the trees,
a relief from reflected days.

The fence was old and easy
and shadows quickly embraced
my overheated heart.

The bright sky silence was gone.
A world's ceaseless struggle
with treetop leaves filled my ear.

The sun-filled road was hidden
by an endless turmoil of shadows
and delicate sparks of fallen light.

The undergrowth grabbed and I
grappled with life's determination
to reach the wide sky above.

It was cool and the birds were noisy.
Furtive unseen creatures rustled
dry grass and fallen leaves.

And there it was, a black stream
animated with white patches;
bright sky fragments from outside.

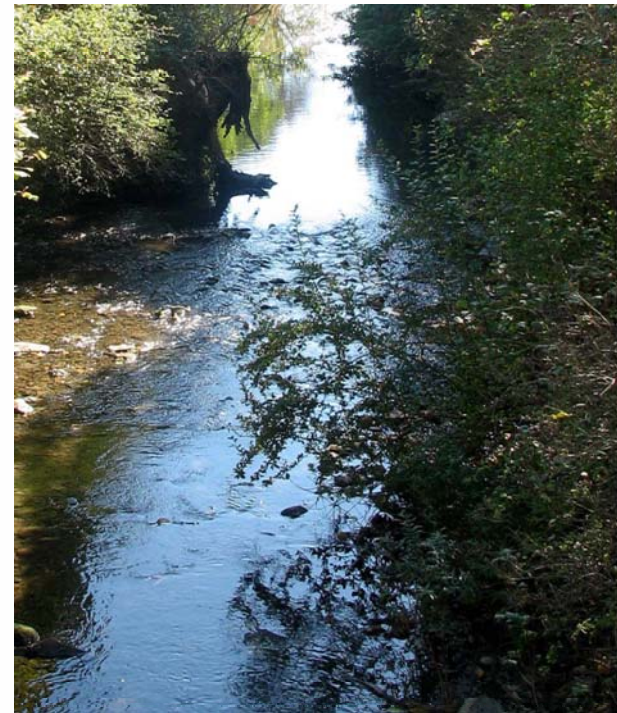
I sat by this stream and watched it carry
the hidden world slowly past my eye.
I listened to the noises and understood.

Roadside Creek

Water slips beneath the road
between lush green, ripples
over shallows then calmly
flows to merge with the lake.

I take a picture, capture
a fragment of old land
where large trees slant
over this profluent stream.

I take a picture and hope
I can remember the peace,
the simple urge of life flowing
beneath this busy artificial path.



Beaten Path

Sailing ships and covered wagons
no longer quicken the blood. Instead,
I complain if forced to drive my shiny car
along a dust-filled gravel road.

The rapid transit of our lives moves
smoothly along bump-free beaten trails,
with signposts to tell us when to stop,
or go, or turn the other way.

I am quietly retired, that euphemism
for old, but I still recall wielding
my trusty axe to cut what seemed
like dangerous untested trails.

The biggest challenge was forgetting
those childhood adventures, losing
those lessons caught in my dreams,
those paradigms of billowing sails.

It seems now that travelled trails
were in fact trimmed and walked
by others. The beaten path cliché
has finally revealed itself.

My wounds and aching muscles
seem invented as I measure them
against sleeping fantasies, excavate
my heroic childhood dreams.

I am learning to work with my left hand,
have acquired glasses to restore
my ability to see hummingbird wings
and I pay close attention to children.

New Trails

The radio blares the righteous news,
all the lapses in our communal life,
every wart that grows out of our seed.

I wonder what the children think, how
they digest the innuendo, the facts
painted by every artist with a name.

The old ground is full of new trails,
footprints are obscured by rain
and moss washes from the trees.

I remember going through the woods,
my shaded path from home to school.
I remember yesterday's footprints.

It was easy then, with no ipod music
or personal ringtones on my cell. Just
me and solid moss clinging to the trees.

Here I am. There were adventures,
fresh trails cut through the woods,
but news from unfelt places floods
my still innocent ears and I wonder.

A Clear Path

Go down any road, look at the sidewalk,
count the people on foot, stop and ask them
where they are going. Offer them
a new path through the woods
where it is lonely and uncertain.

Tell them they will miss the hockey game,
that reality is not really a show
on wide-screen TV. Offer them a cabin
with a fireplace, an axe, and a bucket
beside the door that they can carry
through the bush to a nearby stream.

When they look perplexed, get back
into your car and continue down the street
until you find a movie theatre.

Pay for your ticket and sit in the dark.

The Sound of Stars

Sometimes I think the universe is silent
and there is no music in the stars.

Some gods thunder and proclaim
that their righteous music is clear
if you put your ear to the trumpet.

All I can hear is the crow
as he proclaims his place in the sky
or hummingbird wings that whirr
as it probes a succulent flower.

I can hear a leaf flutter down
from a treetop singing in the wind.
I can even hear grains of sand
as they slide down a desert dune.

But, when it is really quiet, I can
hear the molecules of my mind
as they flow and orchestrate
the music of the stars.

Point and Click

I take pictures of the universe,
snapshots with a wide-angle lens,
pictures that show me how
all the parts are related so I can
determine where I am standing.

Close-ups reveal the inner workings,
how bees kiss a flower or a snake
on a rock consumes the sun and I
am the camera that intrudes
into this intimate intercourse.

In the end, they are only still
pictures, soundless memories,
neurons clicking as they record
the frangible façade of life.

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What Colour is Night?

Take the blue sky,
The yellow sun, the red sunset,
the cold white snow that blows
after green leaves turn brown.
Stir them into a pot of emotions,
pour the mixture over sleeping eyes
and you will not remember.
That will be the colour of night.

Who is Speaking?

It is madness,
the hearing of voices,
those inner vocalizations
and incoherent translations
of a confusing universe.

Mirrors can be useful
but they are mute
and full of extra detail
about flowers and rocks
that clutter the landscape.

But getting back to the voices.
Who is speaking? Who is
shaking the silent cage,
speaking in an antipodal voice
and confusing the cosmos?

If that voice demands praise
and singular adoration,
then it is surely madness
and one should focus
more closely on reflections.

On Foot – Downtown Toronto

The fragmented city sky vibrates
when large trucks growl and struggle
forward on the green light.

The long busses hiss and squeal
as they come to a stop and kneel
for the less able pedestrian.

The kids are in mom's hand or tucked
warmly in soft-wheeled strollers
while some glide on three-wheelers,
imitating the cars but at mom's pace.

Then there's a high pitched wail
and a warning shout that bounces
from the tall building stones.

The red truck speeds to quell
an unintentional fire or attend
a collision – busy lives interrupted.

I sit at a café's cold sidewalk table
and the gray sky presses between
the towers. The cluttered street
has no sunny-side and thin trees
are meager remnants of the forest.
Their small leaves signal spring.

I'm uncertain if the leaves are noticed
as the builders weave their busy lives,
lost in the hustle of their creation.
I'm not moving and feel isolated.

A Daylight Ending

It's a tender moment when the far sky
glows and stars fade into revealing light.

Where is the singing dove, the sun's sentry
that heralds the end of a guardian night?

The dangerous sun cracks the long curve
and finally the dreaming sentinel signals.

As we part, a chilly morning wind
cools our once shrouded passion.

Our eyes grow dull as we play the world
with our everyday animation.

Our hearts beat strongly and we yearn
with a glance as we pass in the street.



Buried Dreams

The sun carves its bloody line,
chases shadows while hope
huddles in the brown grass.

Expectations rise to the stars,
to imagined worlds filled
with the mind's reconstruction
of quotidian events,
with childhood desires for a life
invented without evidence.

As a new sky presses dreams
into the brown patient grass,
I sweeten my black coffee and stir
the bitter taste into oblivion.

I wonder how this day will unfold, how
the grass will support my heavy foot.
Perhaps that hope, those dreams
will cling to my plodding shoe.

Another Winter

Three days of January snow confirms
the sun's calculation that now it's time
to accept cold and the sleeping earth's silence,
time to be still and let the buried sunlight
work its patient mystery. Black squirrels
bounce along the top of our wooden fence,
push aside the fluffy snow, then scramble
nimbly down the small green pine, jounce across
trivial snow drifts and eagerly search our porch
for the cache of summer sunflower seeds.
Later, small birds flutter down, hop and bob
in the rubble and search for fallen bits.

The squirrels and birds pull me back to now,
to the meagre sun glinting on snow,
to the reflection in my patio door
where old summers sigh and sleep in silence.

Hard Times Dismissal

Greed has drained our ability to maintain our workforce at current levels. Falling sales has management worried that their incentives will be in jeopardy and that we will no longer be able to extend credit to customers that are unable to repay their loans.

We are worried that without a job you will contribute to this unforeseen and surprising turn of our economy. We have little choice. The tide is going out and dragging us all into the depressing depths. Too bad you are so close to the shoreline.

We recommend that you follow our lead and whine to the government to give us tax money that has not yet been paid. Make sure your children are well trained so they can get good jobs and pay back this common debt. Our CEO will be grateful.

So, just to close, drive carefully on the way home and don't forget to fill your gas tank while prices are relatively low and you still have some cash.

Regretfully, your boss.

The Futility of Growing Grass

It's a bright spring day and grass grows.
It rains under the sun and grass grows.

Robins search for worms in the growing grass.
Dandelions decorate the growing grass.
Children run and tumble in the growing grass.

Growing grass is soft beneath my feet.
Growing grass reaches and is not neat.

My lawnmower sputters as I pull the cord.
Robins fly away and children go next door.

It's a bright summer day and grass grows.
It rains under the sun and grass grows.

I get more gas for my lawnmower.

Grocery Store Poem

I'm looking for a poem so I go
to the grocery store, wrangle a cart
from the neatly packed rows,
unfold our list of needs and read
the ordered items and it is not a poem.

A lady, to be nice about it, barges ahead
of me through the automatic doors.
She has no cart so will probably
end up at the express checkout.

The entrance is at the fruit and vegetable
section and I think, how easy this would be
if I were a vegetarian, a saviour of the planet
with my sharp canine teeth unused.

I pick through the apples and look
for clean fruit without bruises. I learned
this technique from my wife. She also
wrote this list which is not a poem.

I come to the most dreaded item on the list,
broccoli. How could anyone imagine
that this was really food that humans
should eat. Poems on cardboard taste better.

I pick up bread and buns then slowly
pass the pies calling from their shelves.
I know there are poems in those pies. I can
hear the words baked beneath their crust.

I sadly wait at the fish counter as the pies
quietly mutter their sweet and buttery words.
"Salmon" I say, and the brown-paper-wrapped fish
swims with me to the red meat display.

Now it should be noted that I hurried
through the veggies, those bright red, green
and yellow pages of prose, those crisp words
proselytizing about the evils of meat.

I wait patiently as an anxious crowd
of cholesterol ridden people pick and poke
at the packaged devil meats. My turn comes
and my teeth clench in anticipation.

I feel good, having resisted pies full of poems,
picked only the best green prose so, I select
a package of delicate loin lamb chops
and hurry on to the counters filled with cans.

My list, which is not a poem, instructs me
to pick up peas, beans and split pea soup.
The list is not very spicy so I continue
to the cold and frozen food selections.

Butter is bad so I pick up a substitute spread,
a little bit of OKA cheese for the list maker
and finally, I find a poem in the freezer.
It's icy cold and creamy and I want it.

With my frozen poem, I proceed firmly
to the checkout and wait behind a full cart
with enough food for two weeks or a family
of twelve. I'm sure my poem is getting soft.

Finally, after the points card is scanned,
the credit card swiped, pinned and put away
I am greeted and my goodies get tallied.
I am worried that my poem will lose its shape.

Finally, I rattle the cart across the parking lot,
press the button on my magic keyfob
to unlock the doors of my little red car.
My poem is exposed to the warm sunny day.

Backseat loaded, car in gear, I move slowly
out of the crowded parking lot. These people
who walk every which way and delay my exit,
do not appreciate that I carry a delicate poem.

I'm home at last and my arms stretch
as I strong-arm everything at once,
knowing that my poem cannot wait, knowing
the freezer is sad without its sweet verse.

In the kitchen at last, I carefully place my soft
delicate poem in the cool safe darkness
of the refrigerator frozen food compartment.
I sigh and exhale my accumulated stress.

My wife unpacks and stores the wordless food.
"Where's the pie" she says. "I resisted", I say.
"Didn't like their sweet misleading words.
The real poem is in the freezer."

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Thinking We Have Lived

Heads turn
when loud laughter
echoes across the street.

Death attracts a crowd.

Pain goes by unnoticed.

I despair at smiling
instead of gut-laughing,

instead of weeping
on my knees.

Finding a Bird

The debris of explanations litter
the human landscape; religious rubble
strewn between small flowers of discovery.

A King's archbishop is locked in his house.
Power declares itself and the world shudders.

I know a chap who says he has found Jesus.
I wonder why Jesus hides and has to be found.

I walked by a downtown church the other day.
The doors were closed and the parking lot empty.
I surmised that Jesus must be appearing elsewhere.

The Pope went to Israel last week.
It was confusing as various factions tried
to dress this event in their particular clothes.

People wrap themselves in explosives and I
mourn the loss of exploration and discovery.

I went into a small woods the other day,
took my camera and captured a bird.
The bird went on his way but I
can find him anytime I feel lonely.

What is Life?

*"What is life? It is the flash of a firefly in the night.
It is the breath of a buffalo in the wintertime.
It is the little shadow which runs across the grass
and loses itself in the sunset."*

Crowfoot's last words (1890)

(Blackfoot warrior and orator)

The sun flows across the land, slips
through my hand like the flash of a firefly
in a warm summer night when I am quiet,
when I am ready for the demons of my sleep.

In the cool evenings, little shadows run
across the prairie grass as the sun falls
into the heart of the earth. Chasing summer,
they slide quietly into the rich soil.

The brown earth succumbs to white
and the breath of a buffalo captures
the crisp winter sun that rides mountains
in its low glide across the wide sky.

The shadows become impatient as the sun
pulls snow from the earth, climbs higher
above the mountains, urges green towards
the waiting buffalo and anxious fireflies.

Hand and Eye

I flung a bright eye into space,
the other into dark earth.
My hand was confused
and painted pictures
became a fresh reality,
a yin and yang engaged.

I closed one eye, my brush
slowed and languished
in a singular universe
until it became rigid
with repetition.

I slept and dreamed
eternal darkness.
I awoke and stared
into a sharp sun.

I painted
with a blind hand.

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Looking into a graveyard

Flesh has fallen away. Trees
rustle in a cool ending to green.
A gray-haired man collects
burnt memories; a short history
in a reckless sun where birds,
now grown, flutter
in a warmer sky. Departure
is inevitable as the sky falls
and drifts between the spaces.

We Imagine

The invisible wind is a force
and we imagine a hand brushing
the trees and pulling the sun
out of sight leaving only stars
sliding slowly across the night.

We study the motions,
believe it is the hand of a god
and create our dominion
because we can imagine.
We look into rocks, discover
life flowing from nothing,
because we can.

As we learn how the world works,
the wind becomes empty,
rocks are filled with ancestors
and god retreats
to the edge of the universe.

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Truth Declared

The earth is flat. No, it's round!
The sun goes up then comes down
as it travels 'round the centre
of our lives on this miserable rock.
So do not deny this proclamation
or endless fire will sear your eye.

Winter Dawn

The sun is fixed and we
cannot stand still long enough
to let it warm the winters. Instead
we bask in the weak reflection
of our cold companion. It illuminates
early morning demons. They scurry
along the fenceline, skim
freshly fallen snow, engulf low
black bushes but leave no footprints.

The air carries no telltale odour.
Fresh and clean, some say. But then
the lost sun forces this creation,
this world of living things, shadows
with ill-intent or mythical creatures
fallen from a heaven of light.

All of this can be explained.
If you focus on the window glass,
you will see a reflection
of the mad inventor.

Rondure

This eyeball in the universe,
the engine of our world, pushes
its constant power across
the cold nothingness and drives
into the soil of our anxious lives.

We stare into the east,
build monuments and pray
that the long days will return
to make the hard ground flow.

We huddle in dark caves,
build fires as a meagre substitute,
our shadows dance on the walls,
we are afraid, unsure of its return.

The long nights are harsh
but our prayers seem to work
as the dark is beaten down
and this bright orb once again
makes the earth a graceful place.

...

I never know

I was young
and prophecy had a chance.
My warm hands,
suspicious of error,
moved discreetly away.

Voices seemed interested in me.
Birds,
startled by the question,
said,
“go there”.

Morning Street in the City

There are walkers on the early city street.
Some, with unambiguous purpose, move
with arms pumping to their internal beat.
Others, step to an unheard ipod groove.

There are couples on the early city street.
Some, with no obvious purpose, amble
with arms locked and love's slowness in their feet.
Others, simply abreast, hide love's gamble.

There are lost souls on the early city street.
Some, now finished with their night-time dreams, stroll
alone, searching, their supple eyes discreet.
Others, eyes dim, have clearly paid life's toll.

My shadow huddles in the cold doorway
and dust, wind-driven and wild, starts the day.

The Jury

(after serving on a murder trial jury)

You often pass ordinary strangers
in the street, unaware of their sameness,
unaware of their differences, unaware.

Few wonder, could that person be a friend,
could we laugh together, could we cry,
could we share a winter storm,
could we rest in each other's shade
when the sun sears our skin?

The moment passes and we move on,
pay the bills, go to hockey practice,
get groceries and love those we love
and take no time to wonder.

Fortune does however smile on those
who are pressed out of their ordinary lives,
separated from their ordinary loves,
their daily dislikes and practiced routine.

Thrust into each other's lives they each
shovel the heavy snow, crack the ice,
discover the same black soil beneath.

As they toil, they laugh, and they laugh,
and they cry because it is hard work.

In the end, they do not need to wonder.

Still Pictures

I have walked the line and willing
let myself go slowly spilling
out upon the barren soil. There,
withered upright, my dry brittle
face stares straight into narrow space,
into doorways turned on edge
and hinged with rust. Devoid of lusty
wide-armed aggressive openings,
nurtured on a cold, shrivelled
self-esteem, I am here alone
leafing through a silent picture book
of black and white events.

The liquid honey of myself
oozes from between the pages
into the shells of other lives.

Such a subtle, sordid leaving,
this quiet gentle cleaving
of the spirit from the soul,
like going to the grave unseen.

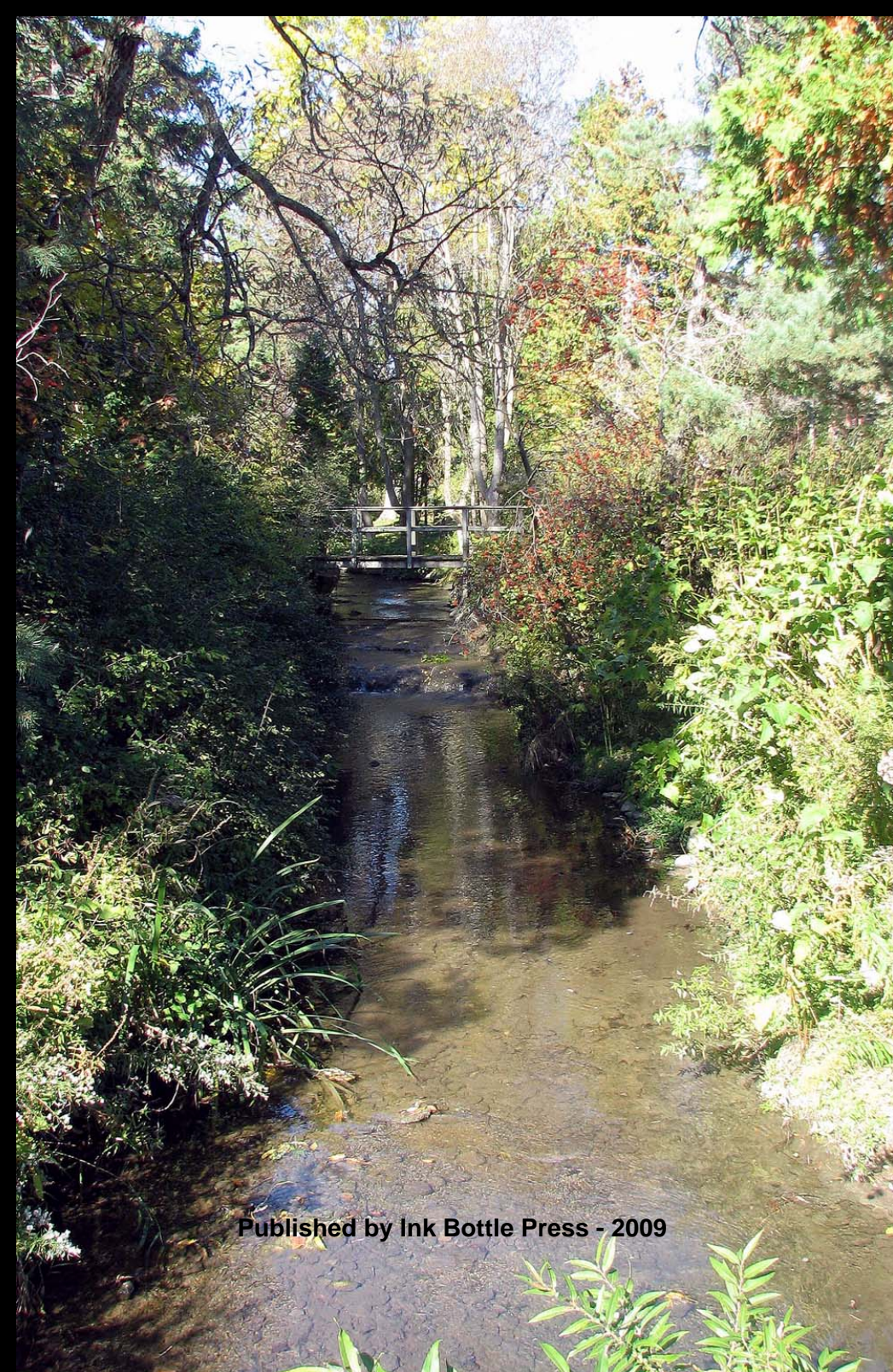
Fall Colours

I emerge spinning in my life of green,
full of careless meandering and sun,
and often wonder where the birds have been.
I chased the succulent day, watched it run

into a bright surprise of sudden red
that flamed at the sharp edge of day's decline.
If I had listened to those birds that fed
on the sun-filled harvest, I would not pine

when the low sun and leaf turn bright yellow.
As the bones emerge, black against the cloud,
I hear wild geese honking south and mellow
as their bold voices echo crisp and loud.

Because the world about has fallen brown
I migrate to the lights that shine in town.



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